

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HA-05 MCT-01 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02
SS-15 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 ICA-11
EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 /076 W
-----100949 041507Z /53

R 040900Z APR 78
FM AMCONSUL MILAN
TO AMEMBASSY ROME
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 5924

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 MILAN 510

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PFOR PINR ECON BGEN
SUBJECT: CABLE FROM PIACENZA

1. ECONOMIC OFFICER AND CONGEN VISITED PIACENZA MARCH 22
TO MEET BISHOP, PREFECT, LOCAL EDITOR, SECRETARIES OF DC,
PSI, PCI, YOUNG DC DEPUTY, CGIL, COLTIVATORI DIRETTI, FARMER'S
UNION, CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION.

2. POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MORO KIDNAPPING WAS CENTRAL
TOPIC OF DISCUSSION. THERE WAS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT RESULT
OF EVENT THUS FAR HAD BEEN TO MOVE PCI CLOSER TO INCLUSION
IN GOVERNMENT.

3. ENERGETIC DC DEPUTY, PROTEGE' OF MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIA-
TION AND ALIGNED WITH PICCOLI, DESCRIBED DC DILEMMA AS MORE
DIFFICULT THAN EVER. HOW COULD DC NOW ESCAPE PCI EMBRACE?
TUMULTUOUS PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS OF COMMUNISTS AND CATHOLICS
MADE RUNNING AGAINST PCI HARDER THAN EVER. YOUNG DC PROVINCIAL
SECRETARY ECHOED WORRY ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT BELIEVE PCI WOULD
GAIN VOTES FROM INCIDENT. PREFECT CONCLUDED THAT PCI
HAD SCORED GAIN FROM ITS HANDLING OF KIDNAPPING.

4. THIS CERTAINLY VIEW OF TWO CGIL OFFICIALS WHO DESCRIBED
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POLITICAL
SITUATION AS DRAMATICALLY CHANGED IN PAST FIVE DAYS. HAD WE
SEEN THE RED AND WHITE FLAGS TOGETHER IN SEA OF DEMONSTRATORS
THROUGHOUT ITALY? NEVER IN POSTWAR ITALY HAD THERE BEEN A
PRECEDENT. DID WE KNOW WHAT THAT MEANT? THE LAST REMNANTS
OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS HAD FALLEN AWAY.
THE YOUNG PCI PROVINCIAL SECRETARY AGREED BUT PLAYED

DOWN ANY BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNISTS. NO DOUBT, HE SAID, ONE BENEFIT HAD BEEN TO OVERSHADOW PCI MEMBER ANGER AT THE COMPOSITION OF THE ANDREOTTI GOVERNMENT. WHEN THAT WAS FIRST REVEALED, THERE WAS A LOT OF LOCAL PROTEST WHICH HAD NOW FADED. THAT WAS GOOD. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, PCI RANK AND FILE WERE ALSO OVERLOOKING MAJOR GAIN PARTY HAD MADE IN BECOMING FULL-FLEDGED MEMBER OF GOVERNMENT MAJORITY.

5. SOCIALIST PROVINCIAL SECRETARY, ANOTHER YOUNG AND VERY ACTIVE CRAXI SUPPORTER, CONCLUDED THAT MORO EPISODE HAD HURT PSI AND BENEFITED COMMUNISTS. PUBLIC SHOCK AND FEAR WOULD DRIVE VOTERS TO ONE OF MASS PARTIES MOST LIKELY TO LOOK LIKE BULWARK AGAINST TERRORISM. THAT HURT ALL MINOR PARTIES INCLUDING PSI, IN HIS VIEW. MOREOVER, PCI HAD HANDLED EVENT WITH CONSUMMATE SKILL. IT HAD INSTANTLY CALLED POLITICAL STRIKE WHICH DC HAD ALWAYS OPPOSED BUT NOW HAD TO SUPPORT. UNITY WAS NOW THE BY WORD.

6. ANOTHER UNFAVORABLE ASPECT OF MORO KIDNAPPING WAS ADVERSE EFFECT IT WOULD HAVE UPON DC LEADERSHIP. THE DC DEPUTY CONCLUDED THAT WHETHER MORO SURVIVED OR NOT, AND HE THOUGHT THAT HE MIGHT, HIS LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTY WOULD BE ENDED. NOR WAS THERE ANYONE IN VIEW WHO WOULD BE ABLE TO HOLD THE PARTY TOGETHER AND LEAD IT. ANDREOTTI WAS A SUPERB PM BUT WITHOUT PRINCIPLE OR A GOAL. FANFANI WAS OUT. PICCOLI OF SECOND RANK. BARTOLOMEI BETTER BUT UNLIKELY. FORLANI HAD BEEN A GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT. CONFIDENTIAL

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ZACCAGNINI NOT WORTH DISCUSSING. THERE WAS DESPERATE NEED FOR A NEW MAN. BUT NONE HAD EVER BEEN GROOMED FOR THE TASK.

7. DC SECRETARY WAS EVEN MORE DEPRESSED ABOUT THIS PROBLEM AND SAW NO SATISFACTORY WAY OUT. ONLY THE SEASONED LIBERAL EDITOR DEFENDED FORLANI AS A POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR TO MORO.

8. THERE WAS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT BRIGATE ROSSE HOPE OF GETTING WORKER SUPPORT AND DRIVING WEDGE BETWEEN DC AND PCI HAD UTTERLY FAILED. IT WAS NOT THAT MANY REGRETTED THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MORO EXCEPT ON HUMANE GROUNDS. WHAT TRIGGERED THE VIOLENT GROUND SWELL OF PROTEST WAS THE KILLING OF THE POLICE AND THE IMPLICIT ATTACK ON THE STATE.

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SS-15 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 ICA-11
EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 /076 W
-----101027 041506Z /53

R 040900Z APR 78
FM AMCONSUL MILAN
TO AMEMBASSY ROME
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9. ACCORDING TO LOCAL ACCOUNTS, FIRST NEWS OF THE KIDNAPPING WAS RECEIVED BY THE PCI SECRETARY, REPETTI. HE IMMEDIATELY CALLED THE PCI MAYOR AND ASKED A MEETING OF ALL THE PARTIES AND MAJOR ORGANIZATIONS - A USUAL PROCEDURE FOR BIG ISSUES. ACCORDING TO REPETTI, HE WANTED A MASS MEETING AT ABOUT 1800 AFTER THE WORKERS HAD ENDED THEIR WORK DAY. HOW- EVER, AS SOON AS THE NEWS REACHED LOCAL PLANTS, THE EMPLOYEES SPONTANEOUSLY DOWNED THEIR TOOLS AND HEADED FOR THE CENTER OF TOWN. LATER ROME CALLED FOR AN IMMEDIATE STRIKE WHICH WAS ALREADY IN PROGRESS IN PIACENZA. AT THE HUGE MASS MEETING THAT TOOK PLACE, SOME DC LEADERS REPORTEDLY WALKED OUT BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF VARIOUS OF THE EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS ON THE GROUNDS THAT THEY HAD NOT EXPLICITLY CONDEMNED THE VIOLENCE. THE LIBERAL EDITOR SAID THAT IN HIS VIEW THE EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY GROUP WAS ALREADY ON THE DEFENSIVE BECAUSE OF THE KIDNAPPING AND WAS COVERING ITSELF.

10. DESPITE THE IMPACT OF THIS NEW FACTOR, BOTH THE DC AND PSI LEADERS SAID THEY EXPECTED TO GAIN GROUND IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS - IF THEY NOW TOOK PLACE IN THE SPRING OF 1979. THE COMMUNIST SECRETARY DOUBTED THAT THE PCI WOULD GAIN MORE THAN A POINT OR TWO BUT EXPECTED A FAIR DC INCREASE AT THE EXPENSE OF THE CENTER PARTIES. WHILE THE DC CLAIMED THAT THE PERFORMANCE OF THE
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PCI-PSI CITY GOVERNMENT SINCE 1975 WOULD COST THE LEFT VOTES, NEITHER THE SOCIALIST NOR COMMUNIST SECRETARIES AGREED. AND OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT THE CITY ADMINISTRATION ENJOYS A PRETTY GOOD REPUTATION EVEN AMONG NON-LEFTIST VOTERS.

11. COMMUNIST PARTY PROVINCIAL HEADQUARTERS ARE LOCATED IN OLD DOWNTOWN PALACE. ALTHOUGH FURNISHINGS NEW AND CONTEMPORARY, WITH IBM TYPEWRITERS AND OTHER NEW OFFICE EQUIPMENT IN SIGHT,

THESE WERE MOST MODEST PCI OFFICES WE HAVE SEEN-PERHAPS BEFITTING ONE OF POORER PROVINCES IN PO VALLEY.

12. ROMANO RIPETTI IS 34 YEAR OLD PCI SECRETARY. ABOUT 5 FEET 2 INCHES TALL, CONSERVATIVELY DRESSED, REPETTI WAS CORDIAL, FORTHCOMING AND OBVIOUSLY SMART. HE DESCRIBED HIMSELF TO BE THE SON OF A PIACENZA MOUNTAIN PEASANT FAMILY A NUMBER OF WHOSE MEMBERS HAD LONG AGO EMIGRATED TO THE UNITED STATES TO ESCAPE THE GRIM POVERTY OF THEIR VILLAGE. REPETTI SAID THAT SUSPICION OF THE PCI AS HARBORING DICTATORIAL PLANS WERE UNFOUNDED. IT WAS A PARTY OF OVER 12 MILLION VOTERS TO WHOM IT HAD BEEN TALKING DEMOCRACY FOR THE PAST 30 YEARS. HOW COULD IT REVERSE ITSELF AND KEEP ITS SUPPORT? MOREOVER, THERE WERE NO PROLETARIAN DICTATORSHIP ADVOCATES TO BE FOUND. HE LAUGHED AT THE REFERENCE TO LUIGI LONGO SAYING THAT HE HAD READ HIS CORRIERE INTERVIEW AND LONGO WAS CERTAINLY AN OLD-TIMER. BUT HE WASN'T TODAY'S PCI. IN PIACENZA, THE PCI NOW HAD ABOUT 7400 MEMBERS. IN 1972 THERE WERE 5000. BUT TODAY MORE THAN HALF OF THE TOTAL WERE NEW AND HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE OLD LINE PARTY. HE-, HIMSELF, AT 34, WAS THE OLDEST MEMBER OF THE SECRETARIAT. THE OTHER FOUR MEMBERS WERE IN THEIR EARLY THIRTIES. THE SAME WAS TRUE IN OTHER AREAS THAT HE KNEW. THIS WAS A YOUNG GENERATION THAT WAS NOT TIED TO THE SOVIET UNION AND HAD NO SYMPATHY FOR IT. THEY HAD GROWN UP IN THE ITALIAN DEMOCRACY AND HAD NO IDEA OF WANTING TO GIVE IT UP. ITALY HAD CONFIDENTIAL

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ITS SHORTCOMINGS. BUT THE PCI WANTED REFORMS TO CORRECT THEM NOT TO DESTROY THE SYSTEM.

13. REPETTI ARGUED THAT IT WAS DREAMING TO ASSUME THAT SOMEHOW THE PCI COULD WIN A NATIONAL MAJORITY. IT WAS MUCH MORE LIKELY THAT THE DC WOULD CONTINUE TO HAVE VETO ON EVERYTHING AND THAT ANY GOVERNMENT OR ORGANIZATION WOULD HAVE TO BE A COMPROMISE ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH DC AND PCI. THAT LEFT NO ROOM FOR A DICTATORSHIP EVEN IF SOMEONE IN THE PCI WANTED ONE.

14. BUT COULDN'T BERLINGUER AND ALL OF HIS FOLLOWERS BE REMOVED BY SOVIET SYMPATHIZERS LIKE LONGO AND COSSUTA? REPETTI SAID HE COULDN'T SEE IT. SINCE 1956 PROVINCIAL OFFICERS WERE LOCALLY ELECTED. SUCH A CHANGE TO REVERSE THE COURSE OF PCI POLICY WOULD TAKE A LONG LONG TIME AND COST THE PARTY DEARLY.

15. IN FACT, REPETTI SAID, THE PCI IS COMMITTED TO THE WEST. IT HAD MADE ITS CHOICE. BERLINGUER HAD EVEN SAID THAT THE COMMUNISTS NEEDED NATO AND THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES. HE WAS RIGHT. COMMUNISTS WERE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE. THEY SAW THE UNITED STATES AS A MODEL AND WISHED TO EMULATE IT. THEY WANTED AUTOMOBILES AND AN AMERICAN STANDARD OF LIVING TOO. BUT DID THE PCI WANT THE ASPECT OF THE UNITED STATES THAT WE WERE MOST PROUD OF,

OUR LIBERAL DEMOCRACY? WITHOUT A QUESTION, REPETTI INSISTED.
HE HAD NO INTENTION OF BEING DICTATED TO BY ANYONE AND HIS
MEMBERS WOULD NEVER LET HIM DICTATE TO THEM.

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ACTION EUR-12

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SS-15 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 ICA-11
EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 /076 W
-----101806 041506Z /53

R 040900Z APR 78
FM AMCONSUL MILAN
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16. MUCH THE SAME POSITION WAS TAKEN BY THE TWO PCI CGIL
SECRETARIAT MEMBERS IN RESPONSE TO A SERIES OF CRITICISMS
OF THE PCI. THEY ARGUED THAT THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY
WAS ENTIRELY OF DOMESTIC CREATION. IT HAD NOT BEEN BROUGHT
IN AND INSTALLED BY SOVIET TANKS. AND SINCE IT HAD
GROWN UP IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY AND AS A PART OF A DEMO-
CRATIC SOCIETY, IT WAS AND WOULD CONTINUE TO BE DEMOCRATIC.
I HAVEN'T RAISED MY NINETEEN YEAR OLD SON TO LIVE IN ANYONES
DICTATORSHIP AND HE WOULDN'T ACCEPT IT EITHER, THE OLDER
INSISTED.

17. THE LAMA POLICIES WERE FINE AS FAR AS OUR CGIL INTER-
LOCUTORS WERE CONCERNED AND THEY SAW NO PROBLEM ABOUT LOCAL
ACCEPTANCE IN PRACTICE. A SIMILAR VIEW WAS SHARED BY THE DC
DEPUTY, A FAIRLY LARGE EMPLOYER, WHO SAID TRADE UNION RE-
LATIONS HAD ALREADY GREATLY IMPROVED AND PROMISED TO GET
BETTER.

18. COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE (C&L) WAS REPORTED AS PULLING
OUT OF POLITICS IN PIACENZA AS IN MILAN AND ELSEWHERE.
ACCORDING TO THE VERY POLITICAL BISHOP, C&L WANTED TO BROADEN
ITS FOLLOWING AND TO DO SO FELT THAT IT HAD TO BECOME MORE
RELIGIOUS AND LESS POLITICAL. IT WAS LEAVING
POLITICS TO THE BORRUSO LED MOVIMENTO POPOLARE. THE DC PROVINCIAL
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SECRETARY CONFIRMED THIS EVOLUTION WITH NO NOTICEABLE SORROW ADDING THAT LOCALLY C&L WAS MUCH WEAKER THAN IN THE PAST.

19. PIACENTINE BUSINESSMEN COMPLAIN THAT THE LATE 1977 FALL IN INTERNAL DEMAND HAD HURT THEIR SALES AND THAT THERE HAD NOT YET BEEN A TURN AROUND IN ORDERS. HOURS OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE WERE RISING AND UNEMPLOYMENT WAS SUBSTANTIALLY MORE THAN A YEAR AGO. NEVERTHELESS, THE CRISIS WAS STILL LIMITED AND THE PROVINCE'S MOST IMPORTANT INDUSTRIES - METAL WORKING AND HEAVY EQUIPMENT CONSTRUCTION - WERE DOING AS WELL AS EVER.

20. TO MAKE UP FOR LOST DOMESTIC SALES, LOCAL BUSINESSMEN WERE DISCOVERING FOREIGN MARKETS. MEN WHO WERE COMMON LABORERS ONLY TWENTY YEARS AGO, WERE NOW TRAVELLING ABROAD TO MARKET THE WARES OF THE SMALL BUSINESSES THEY NOW OPERATED.

21. AGRICULTURE WAS ALSO A STABILIZING FORCE. SALES HAD BEEN GOOD AND, EXCEPT FOR THE DAIRY INDUSTRY WHERE FARMERS CLAIMED ADMINISTERED PRICES WERE TOO LOW, MOST FARMERS WERE DOING WELL. STILL, DESPITE AGRICULTURE'S STRONG ROLE IN PIACENZA, IT WAS NOT THE SOURCE OF WEALTH THAT IT WAS IN MANY OTHER PROVINCES ALONG THE PO. LAND IS MARGINAL IN THE HILLY COUNTRYSIDE, AND FARMS EVEN IN THE FLAT PLAINS ARE EXTREMELY SMALL. MANY SMALLER FARMERS THUS NEED PART-TIME JOBS TO SUPPLEMENT THEIR INCOME.

22. FARMERS ARE WHITE AND TO THE RIGHT, ACCORDING TO THE PIACANZA DC. NEARLY 98 PERCENT BELONG TO THE TWO NON-COMMUNIST FARM ORGANIZATIONS. ALTHOUGH FARM LEADERS ARE STANDING THEIR DISTANCE FROM THE COMMUNISTS, THEY DID NOT SEEM WORRIED ABOUT COMMUNIST PERIL TO AGRICULTURE. THE HEAD OF THE DC FARM GROUP, WHO DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS A STRONG ANTI-COMMUNIST, EVEN HAD WORDS OF RESPECT FOR THE PROVINCE'S COMMUNIST LEADERS.

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23. BUSINESSMEN WERE EVEN LESS CONCERNED ABOUT THE COMMUNISTS THAN WERE THE FARMERS. "THE POLITICAL REALITY IS THAT THEY EXIST, THEY HAVE STRONG SUPPORT, AND WE HAVE TO WORK WITH THEM", SAID THE PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE. A PROMINENT INDUSTRIALIST WAS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE, TOO. THE THOUSANDS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED BUSINESSMEN WHO MAKE UP THE DRIVING FORCE OF THE ITALIAN ECONOMY HAD WORKED THEMSELVES UP FROM THE BOTTOM AND DID NOT KNOW HOW TO DO ANYTHING ELSE BUT WORK, HE REASONED. BUT THEIR CHILDREN, NOW MOVING IN TO TAKE OVER THE FAMILY BUSINESS WERE POLITICALLY ORIENTED, BASICALLY CONSERVATIVE, AND KNEW THEIR WAY AROUND.

24. FOR MOST OF OUR CONTACTS, THINGS WERE QUIET IN PIACENZA.
THEY CONSIDERED THEMSELVES ISOLATED FROM ITALY'S BIGGEST POLITICAL
AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. AND THEY WANT TO KEEP IT THAT WAY.FINA

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: KIDNAPPING, POLITICAL PARTIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 04 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MILAN00510
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780145-0341
Format: TEL
From: MILAN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780495/aaaadczn.tel
Line Count: 336
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: f8ae09b7-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 19 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3082926
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CABLE FROM PIACENZA
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, PINR, ECON, BGEN, PINS, IT
To: ROME
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/f8ae09b7-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014